



Joint Information Center

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency

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Winter Storm Stresses Individuals and Families

(Note: Sound bites are available in MP3 format at: <http://www.bhss.ne.gov/audio>.)

Joint Information Center, Grand Island, NE: Disasters like devastating winter storms and the loss of power create a tremendous amount of stress. Mental health experts say if this stress goes unrecognized and unmanaged, it can increase until sometimes a person feels like it's impossible to cope. If you recognize and handle stress properly, however, it can become something healthy that gets you through the challenges of each day and the trauma of a disaster.

Adjusting to life without electricity can be exhausting.

- It is common to feel tired or worn out even with adequate sleep.
- Sometimes people are surprised at how intense and changing their emotions are.
- Everyone reacts to the stress of recovery in their own way.

Beth Reynolds, Emergency System Specialist for Region 3 Behavioral Health, offers these tips to help manage stress:

- **Talk it out. You're not in this alone.** Your family, friends, and neighbors are feeling some of the same anxieties you're experiencing.
- **Take care of yourself.** Try to eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest. Try physical activity. Release the tension of stress by walking in the evenings or some other type of exercise.
- **Know your limits and make time for relaxation.** Try to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying about the things you cannot change. Cut down or eliminate the activities that cause you stress. Use the time to talk, play games or spend time with friends or family.
- **Take control.** Find out what you can do to move your family or those you know closer to recovery. There are many ways to help someone who is coping with the loss of electricity. If you can safely help neighbors or families that are without power here are some suggestions:
 - Offer practical help like cooking, running errands, or babysitting.
 - Help someone get away from home for a day or a few hours.
 - Consider offering your home if you have available space.

- If family and friends have phone service, you might call regularly and check on them and offer to talk about their problems.
 - DO NOT put yourself in danger to help others. If you can't drive safely, don't!
 - **Remember to accept help from others when it is offered.**
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- **Seek help when you need it. It's a sign of strength.** If you feel your problem is more serious or if you're experiencing hopelessness or extreme anger, you may want to consider seeking help from a physician, mental health professional, or clergy member. A crisis hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the Mid-Plains Center in Grand Island for mental health care. That number is 1-800-515-3326.